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PRESS RELEASE

'Viva independence' rings out in Dili court

An East Timorese, Saturnino da Costa Belo, who was present in the Dili court today to attend the trial of the resistance leader Xanana Gusmao stunned the court when he suddenly stood up and shouted: *Viva East Timor, Viva Xanana, Viva independence!*'. He had been summoned to testify as a prosecution witness. His action caused uproar; proceedings were suspended as he was hustled out of court. An hour later, a doctor came to inform the court that the witness was 'unfit to appear'.

It is highly likely that Saturnino will be subjected to mal-treatment and torture for his act of defiance so pressure is needed to protect him.

Saturnino da Costa Belo is himself serving a nine-year sentence, having been tried in Baucau, East Timor, in June last year under the anti-subversion law for involvement in the demonstration in Dili on 12 November 1991. At the commencement of his own trial, he told the court that he did not want to be defended by an Indonesian lawyer and would only agree to being defended by a Fretilin lawyer. The court appointed a duty solicitor to handle his case.

At an earlier hearing of the trial, Xanana Gusmao was severely reprimanded by the presiding judge for waving to his parents and his sister who were present in court. After waving, he placed two fingers on his lips, as a signal for keeping silent. The judge warned him that it was "very impolite indeed" to wave to anyone in court and ordered him to apologise. Xanana said nothing in response. According to *Kompas* which reported the incident [26.II.1993], his parents were very upset over what had happened. His younger sister, Felomena Gusmao, burst into tears, and shouted: "Fancy telling him off for waving to his parents!"

London, 4 March 1993